

LETRAS Y FIGURAS

Cultural life in this gas-lit era blossomed as a result of the opening of the colony's doors and windows to global trends. The *Teatro de Binondo* was the first formal brick-and-mortar Spanish theater in the country, built in 1846 in the midst of what is now still Chinatown. According to Cristina Laconico-Buenaventura's *The Theater in Manila, 1846–1946*, some well-known Spanish plays were presented, and an honest-to-goodness Spanish troupe from Cadiz, the *Compañía de Teatro del Valon* with Manuel Lopez de Ariza at its helm, even migrated to the Philippines. As some Manila residents metamorphosed from spectator to participant in theater, a drama in three acts with a largely Filipino (meaning criollo) cast performed in verse (June 11, 1865) a Filipino theme entitled *La Conquista de Jolo*.

A peninsular playwright, Francisco Entrala, who arrived in Manila in 1873, immersed himself so deeply in Manila life he acquired the title “*el Filipino con cara blanca*” (Filipino with a white face). He published novels on local subjects: *La Rubia de Quiapo* (The red-head from Quiapo) and *La Morena de Sampaloc* (The brown-skinned girl of Sampaloc). In 1882, he presented to the public *Cuadros Filipinos*, a two-act play. Act one, *El palengke* (The Marketplace), went well with the audience; not so act two, *La Comedia Tagala* (The Tagalog Comedia), which satirized the outmoded

mannerisms of the Tagalog *moro-moro*. His aim was to show its absurdities in order to create a desire for improved theater techniques, but the Filipino audience did not appreciate his humor; to them, he was making fun of Filipino theatrical tastes, and they vociferously expressed their resentment with hisses and flying missiles. The *Filipino con cara blanca* ended up with a red face. But at least now they were quarreling about Philippine theatrical themes and problems.

Even earlier than all these, Tagalog theater was performed in thatch and bamboo structures, one of which was called *Teatro de Tondo*, thriving, if at times sporadically, from the early 1840s to the early 1890s. Here on many a night, *comedias* which were long, drawn-out fantastic tales of chivalry delivered in verse (such as the much-loved *Baldovino*) were staged to an appreciative mestizo and Indio audience. Performances were serialized over several nights. By the last decade of the century, Tagalog playwrights such as Francisco Balagtas, author of more than a hundred *moro-moro* plays (among these the classic *Florante at Laura*), had established a mass-based theater tradition.

Certainly by the 1860s, theater was a feature of the city's cultural life. Italian opera and French operettas vied with Spanish *zarzuelas* and Chinese operas. Shadow plays known as *carrillos*, performed in Spanish, Tagalog, and Chinese, were also crowd pleasers. Chinese operas (*Comedias Chinas*) were so popular with the Sangley and Binondo folks that in 1867 government tax receipts recorded 289 presentations for the months of September and October alone, paying a five-peso tax for each presentation. This ultimately led to a permanent Chinese theater in Binondo which gave nightly performances.

The missionaries introduced Western music as part of church liturgy. Endowed with a good ear for music, Filipinos quickly became adept at its many forms. Be it harp, piano, guitar, or violin, the mestizo and Indio took to it readily. Their vocal cords mastered solemn church choral pieces and sophisticated operatic arias. Band music was introduced throughout the islands by the military bands of the various *regimientos* assigned in various parts of the archipelago. Musicians from the native regiments ultimately trained aspiring instrumentalists to form local bands wherever they were

stationed. By the last quarter of the 19th century, band music was a standard and lively feature of town fiestas and religious processions. In Manila, the evening *paseo* had long been the occasion for weekly band concerts.

The distinctly Filipino musical form known as the *kundiman* came into its own in the 19th century. Evening *tertulias* in ilustrado homes became occasions for musical soirees. While some ilustrados in Europe (among them Jose Rizal and Juan Luna) gamely struggled with amateur attempts at the flute, others like Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo and Manuel Luna (Juan's eldest brother) were highly adept violinists who could creditably perform with distinguished Spanish musical figures Tarrega and Arnedo. With a diploma of Professor of Violin from the *Real Conservatorio de Madrid*, Manuel Luna, for example, was considered a most promising virtuoso whose career was nipped in the bud when he died at the age of 26.



Of all the arts, however, it was painting that somehow captivated the ilustrado mind. This visual art form did not have any tradition to speak of among the inhabitants of the Philippines prior to Hispanization. Formal academic art training began in the 19th century, in 1821, when the *Real Sociedad Economica de Amigos del Pais* set up the *Academia de Dibujo* in Manila. Some years later, an artist from Tondo, a mestizo named Damian Domingo, was appointed as its director. Domingo's directions from the *Sociedad* specifically stated that he would "enroll anyone who applies regardless of whether he be Spaniard, mestizo, or Indio, as long as there is room and he presents himself decently ..." (Quirino, 1969, p. 82). Carlos Quirino in *Damian Domingo: Filipino Painter* speculates that this could very well be at the instance of Domingo himself who was a Spanish mestizo married to a Chinese mestiza and, therefore, familiar and unhappy with racist bars. Whether he originated the policy or not, Domingo's background assured he would apply this enlightened anti-discriminatory rule diligently.

But even before the birth of the *Academia*, Domingo's studio was already offering private lessons. A Domingo legacy is an album of watercolors depicting various classes of inhabitants of the archipelago.

increased awareness of the world outside stirred up a sense of self-identity among both sitters and painters.

After the landmark triumph of Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo in Madrid in 1884, painting suddenly became the major political trophy, demonstrating the Filipino besting the best of the Peninsulares in their own home grounds. It can be said that, even before Filipinos had acquired literary facility in the Spanish language, they had gained complete mastery of paint. Perhaps because the arts were seen as an *adorno* carrying less political baggage, painting blossomed faster. Thus, the apolitical painters were leaders of the cultural flowering and the magical self-discovery of national identity. The ilustrado portraits proudly proclaimed: we are the new breed, the new culture called Filipino.